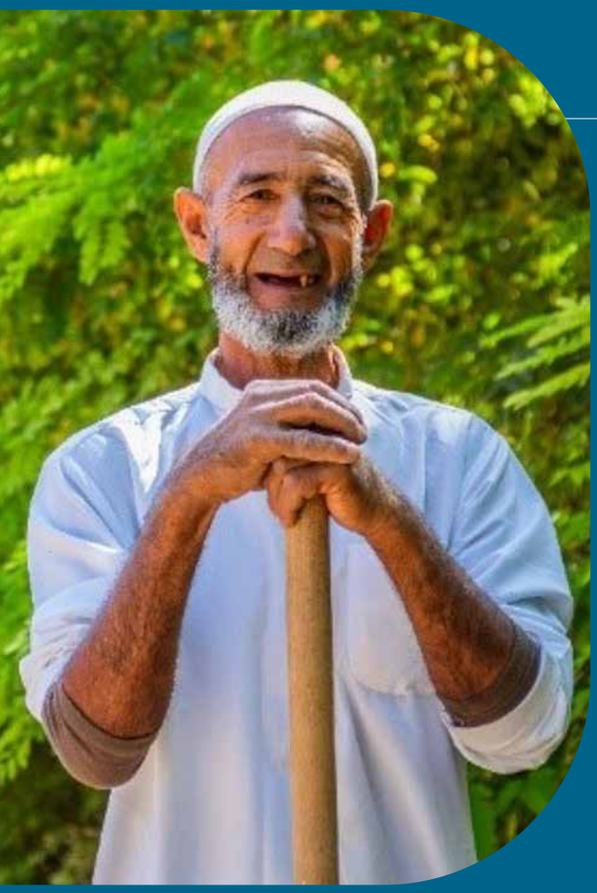
UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Global Alliance to
End Statelessness



ENDING STATELESSNESS *TOGETHER*







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ENDING STATELESSNESS *TOGETHER*



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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

In 2014, UNHCR launched the #IBelong campaign with the ambitious goal of ending statelessness in a decade. The leadership of governments, working together with civil society and stateless communities themselves, has since resulted in over 560,000 stateless people worldwide obtaining a nationality. The impact of these efforts, however, far exceeds this number. As a result of this foundation, each successive generation of children born to these families will also start life with a nationality, along with the security, hope and opportunities that it provides.

As we close the chapter on 10 years of this collective work, I want to congratulate States in Asia and the Pacific for their exceptional stewardship and achievements in addressing this issue. The first two countries in the world to have succeeded in eradicating all known cases of statelessness within their territories are both in the Asia-Pacific region, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan. Their historic efforts are complemented by bold and innovative steps adopted by a growing number of States across the broader region to prevent and reduce statelessness.

Despite the immense progress made, however, more work is still needed. At least 4.4 million people worldwide remain without a nationality, living each day without the opportunities, hope and dignity that citizenship provides. States in the Asia-Pacific region currently account for over a third of all cases of statelessness resolved globally. Resolving statelessness for the millions still awaiting a solution will require the commitment and collaboration of a broad coalition of leaders and stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels.

To help galvanize this diverse array of actors around the common purpose of eradicating statelessness, our High Commissioner launched the Global Alliance to End Statelessness in October 2024. The Global Alliance has already attracted hundreds of members, notably including the Governments of Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkmenistan. Stateless people themselves have an invaluable role to play as experts, advocates and partners in the shared work of finding solutions, and the Global Alliance actively promotes their involvement.

In keeping with this vision, this report puts the voices of formerly stateless people at the forefront. I am confident that by working in concert and expanding the community of stakeholders lending their expertise, skills and commitment to this issue, we can end statelessness for millions more in the years ahead.

I hope that the achievements detailed in this report will serve as inspiration for the important work that remains to be done.

Hai Kyung Jun



Director

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

INTRODUCTION

Record numbers of people were forced to flee their homes and countries as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in 2024, as new armed conflicts emerged and intensified, and long-standing ones defied resolution. For more than 12 years, this number has continued to grow, and stateless people are among those forcibly displaced. The root causes that drive and prolong this displacement, such as political turmoil, armed conflict and insecurity, are complex and long-standing. Meaningful opportunities to secure durable solutions for the majority of the world's refugees and IDPs require sustained and longer-term strategies, including sustained strengthening of humanitarian, development and security capacities.

Statelessness, however, is solvable today.

As countries in the Asia-Pacific region have shown, the statelessness of an entire population can be resolved at once, as the Government of Turkmenistan did by Presidential decree at a dedicated ceremony in September 2024 that simultaneously resolved all known cases of statelessness in the country.

As the conclusion of UNHCR's 10-year #IBelong Campaign, 2024 also presents an important milestone to jointly reflect on how these achievements were made possible, the changes they have brought to people's lives and the lessons learned on how to build on this strong foundation of work.

Countries in the region are making important strides across varied areas of law, policy and practice, in close alignment with UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness (2014-2024), which outlined 10 key actions where efforts are most needed. Progress is particularly notable on States resolving existing cases of statelessness (Action 1), updating laws to ensure that no child is born stateless (Action 2), and making sure that their civil registration systems leave no one behind and furnish every child with an official birth certificate (Action 7).

Central Asia has made enormous contributions toward the goal of ending statelessness, collectively resolving one-third of worldwide cases and demonstrating global and regional leadership in achieving the goals of the #IBelong Campaign, now transitioning to the new Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

ASHGABAT DECLARATION ON ENDING STATELESSNESS IN CENTRAL ASIA

On 8 November 2024, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan gathered in Turkmenistan for the *Central Asian Ministerial Conference on Statelessness*. This conference culminated in the successful adoption of the Ashgabat Declaration on Ending Statelessness in Central Asia, which reaffirms the commitment of these States to address statelessness to facilitate full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Ashgabat Declaration also encourages States to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

1. **ENHANCEMENT OF STATELESSNESS DETERMINATION PROCEDURES**
2. **FACILITATION OF CROSS-BORDER CONFIRMATION OF NATIONALITY**
3. **REDUCTION OF REMAINING STATELESS POPULATIONS**
4. **PROMOTION OF REGIONAL COOPERATION AND BEST PRACTICES**
5. **STRENGTHENING DATA COLLECTION AND TRANSPARENCY**
6. **ALIGNMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND CONVENTIONS**
7. **SUPPORT FOR BIRTH REGISTRATION AND LEGAL IDENTITY FOR ALL CHILDREN**
8. **INCLUSION OF STATELESS PERSONS IN NATIONAL SYSTEMS**

The Kyrgyz Republic made history in 2019 as the first country globally to successfully resolve all known cases of statelessness in its territory. Building on this milestone, Turkmenistan achieved a similar landmark in September 2024, resolving all known cases of statelessness on its territory. **Turkmenistan** has the distinction of being the first State to do so that has also taken the important step of acceding to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which provide a shared foundation for countries to prevent and reduce statelessness. These historic steps are complemented by **Tajikistan's** introduction of a time-bound Amnesty Law enabling stateless people to regularize their status and avoid prolonged statelessness, **Uzbekistan's** legislative amendments in 2020 that made over 60,000 stateless people eligible for citizenship, and **Kazakhstan's** establishment in 2020 of dedicated statelessness determination procedures (SDP), coupled with national campaigns that successfully documented thousands people as citizens or as stateless persons in need of nationality.

Countries across the broader Asia-Pacific region are also undertaking an array of efforts to achieve **universal birth registration** as part of their commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and to fully implement their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 7) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 24).

States are actively translating the foundational principles enshrined in these instruments into concrete action. Many are enacting new legislation to ensure every person enjoys their right to a legal identity, while specifically incorporating provisions to prevent new cases of statelessness and resolve statelessness where it already exists. In 2022, the **Philippines** adopted the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act to ensure every child found in the country (including in its consulates and embassies abroad) whose parents are unknown receives an official birth certificate and is confirmed as a citizen of the Philippines. While most countries also have legal provisions to ensure foundlings (children of unknown parentage) are not left stateless, the implementation of these protections and safeguards is extremely limited in practice globally due to the absence of clear regulations and guidance on their application. In contrast, as of November 2024, over 7,000 foundlings have been issued with birth certificates in the Philippines, all of whom are also recognized as citizens, demonstrating that these important legal principles are being effectively translated into action.


© UNHCR/Frederic Noy

This law, a global model for protecting and preventing statelessness amongst foundlings, has been followed by several ambitious legal reforms in the region.

In 2023, **Cambodia** adopted the Law on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identification to achieve universal civil registration and establish the right to identity documents for all people living in the country. In the same year, **India** amended its Births and Deaths Registration Act to require the establishment of a comprehensive, permanent electronic database of all registered births and deaths. The law affords all individuals and families the right to query this database to obtain official proof of any registered birth or death, which ensures they can verify their individual identities as well as the composition and status of their families where key identity documents, such as birth certificates, are lost or destroyed. Additionally, in 2023, **Viet Nam** enacted a new Law on Identification to improve civil registration, while also mandating the issuance of personal identity documents for stateless people of Vietnamese origin in the country, laying the foundation for legal residency and naturalization.

1

VOICES OF FORMERLY STATELESS PERSONS

Statelessness is often framed as a technical legal issue, but its impacts on individual lives, families and entire communities are dramatic and far-reaching. The following firsthand accounts from formerly stateless persons who obtained a nationality in the last 10 years,[1] highlights how ending their statelessness has opened doors that were previously closed to them and has changed their lives forever.

1 This includes examples of stateless persons who were granted nationality, as well as persons whose nationality was confirmed and officially documented.



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Kazakhstan

VICTOROVICH

QUOTE *"With [identity] papers, you feel like a man. I can go anywhere; I can do anything."*

Victorovich (pseudonym) was born in the former Soviet Union and moved to Kazakhstan with his parents when he was six years old. His U.S.S.R documents were destroyed in a fire at his family's home during his high school years. Although he was able to finish his studies, his lack of identity documents made it impossible to secure formal employment, travel abroad, or access healthcare. With the support of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Victorovich was able to go through the steps required to obtain Kazakh nationality, namely, first obtaining documentation from the Russian Federation confirming that he was not a citizen of Russia, then submitting the necessary paperwork to be documented as a stateless person in Kazakhstan, and finally obtaining Kazakh nationality in 2024.



© UNHCR/Danil Usmanov

Kazakhstan

NATALIYA

QUOTE *"When I got citizenship, then of course I had more privileges. And immediately as a mother of many children I was noticed, and I had rights."*

Nataliya was born in the Russian Federation during the former Soviet Union. She moved to Kazakhstan at the age of 13 years. Over the subsequent years, her Soviet-issued birth certificate was lost. Without proof of identity, she was unable to continue her education after the ninth grade, obtain an ID card, secure a permanent job or register her marriage. She was not permitted to attend vocational school, because they too required identity documents that Nataliya did not have. For years, Nataliya could not be officially employed, and instead struggled to support herself with many informal part-time jobs. When her five children were born, none were issued birth certificates. With the support of the NGO Sana Sezim, Nataliya obtained a Stateless Person Certificate, which served as the foundation for obtaining Kazakh nationality. After acquiring citizenship, Nataliya was able to register her marriage and officially document her five children, who are now eligible for social benefits. After the birth of her 8th child, Natalia received the 'Altyn Alka' (Golden Pendant) State award of Kazakhstan awarded to mothers who have raised large families.



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Kazakhstan



In 2019, Kazakhstan amended its national legislation and practices to ensure all births in its territory are registered, irrespective of the legal or documentation status of a child's parents. In 2020, the country established a statelessness determination procedure (SDP), a critical step in reliably identifying stateless persons and ensuring they enjoy the rights to which they are entitled until they acquire a nationality.

The SDP was amended in 2024 to grant all applicants the right to be interviewed, obtain certificates confirming that they have applied for recognition of stateless person status, be heard during the preparation of draft denials of status, appeal denials, and receive free legal representation in the case of children and persons with limited legal capacity. The processing time for SDP applications was reduced from 45 to 30 days. Once identified and documented as a stateless person, individuals enjoy rights to tangible and intellectual property, freedom of movement, access to courts and the Human Rights Commissioner of Kazakhstan, as well as the same rights as citizens with respect to personal status, employment, healthcare, and social and pension benefits.

NATIONALITY

Kazakhstan has

GRANTED NATIONALITY TO 15,000 STATELESS PERSONS

and is taking ambitious steps to end statelessness in its territory.

Documented stateless persons who have also obtained permanent residency status are entitled to free technical and vocational, post-secondary, higher, and postgraduate education on a competitive basis.

These measures to identify and protect stateless people are complemented by reforms to accelerate naturalization for certain groups, such as widows of citizens, children, people with limited legal capacity, persons who have made special contributions to Kazakhstan, and ethnic Kazakhs ('kandasses'). Moreover, Kazakhstan continues outreach efforts to proactively identify and assist stateless people in confirming or acquiring nationality.

The Kyrgyz Republic



Coinciding with the launch of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic collaborated closely with UNHCR to eliminate statelessness within its territory, becoming the **first country to successfully resolve all known cases of statelessness** in 2019. This historic milestone was made possible through targeted campaigns to identify over 13,700 stateless people, including more than 2,000 children, over the course of five years. Depending on each individual's situation, their statelessness was resolved through either birth registration or by the confirmation or acquisition of nationality, which was officially documented through the provision of national identity documents.

Civil society leaders played a critical role in the process. Azizbek Ashurov, a lawyer featured in this publication, coordinated legal support to thousands of stateless people over the course of the last 20 years. Working in close collaboration with the Government, Azizbek coordinated mobile campaigns in remote parts of the country to identify and assist stateless people—efforts for which he won UNHCR's 2019 Nansen Refugee Award.

STATELESSNESS

In 2019, the Krygyz Republic became the

1st COUNTRY

to resolve all known cases of statelessness its territory.

In 2023, the Kyrgyz Republic further aligned its national legislation with international standards by ensuring universal birth registration of every child born in its jurisdiction, including those previously not able to obtain a birth certificate because they were born to undocumented or stateless parents. The country also introduced dedicated safeguards against statelessness in the context of voluntary renunciations of citizenship, in keeping with standards in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

The Kyrgyz Republic

ABDUSAMAT SAPAROV

QUOTE

"It's very difficult to be a stateless person. It was always my dream to open a bee farm, but this is the first time since 1995 I have been able to do it."

"If even bees need documents, then people should too. Every person wants to have documents."

Abdusamat was born in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. He moved to the Kyrgyz Republic after the dissolution of the Soviet Union but, like many, did not obtain the nationality of any successor State. He remained stateless for many years, with no access to formal employment. After obtaining nationality, he fulfilled his lifelong dream of working as a beekeeper making honey for a living. He now has 80 colonies of 10,000 bees each.

READ MORE ABOUT

Abdusamat's story at: Citizenship tastes sweet to Kyrgyzstan beekeeper | UNHCR



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Malaysia

LING AI HUA

QUOTE

"When I finally received my MyKAD [Malaysian citizenship card], it was bittersweet. By then, my health had begun to decline, and the years I could have spent contributing to this country were gone [...] I am finally recognized as a citizen of Malaysia, the country where I was born."

"Though my time is limited, I am at peace knowing that I belong."

Ling Ai Hua is an 80-year-old woman who was born in Malaysia. Her parents, like many in their generation, were unaware of the importance of registering their children's births, and never took her to be registered, which ultimately left her and her siblings stateless.

Ling Ai Hua applied for citizenship many times but was unsuccessful because she lacked sufficient supporting documentation to prove her birth in Malaysia. Ultimately, her son worked to gather the evidence needed to support her citizenship application. In February 2024, at the age of 80, she finally became a citizen of Malaysia, the country where she was born and has lived her entire life.



© DHRRA Malaysia

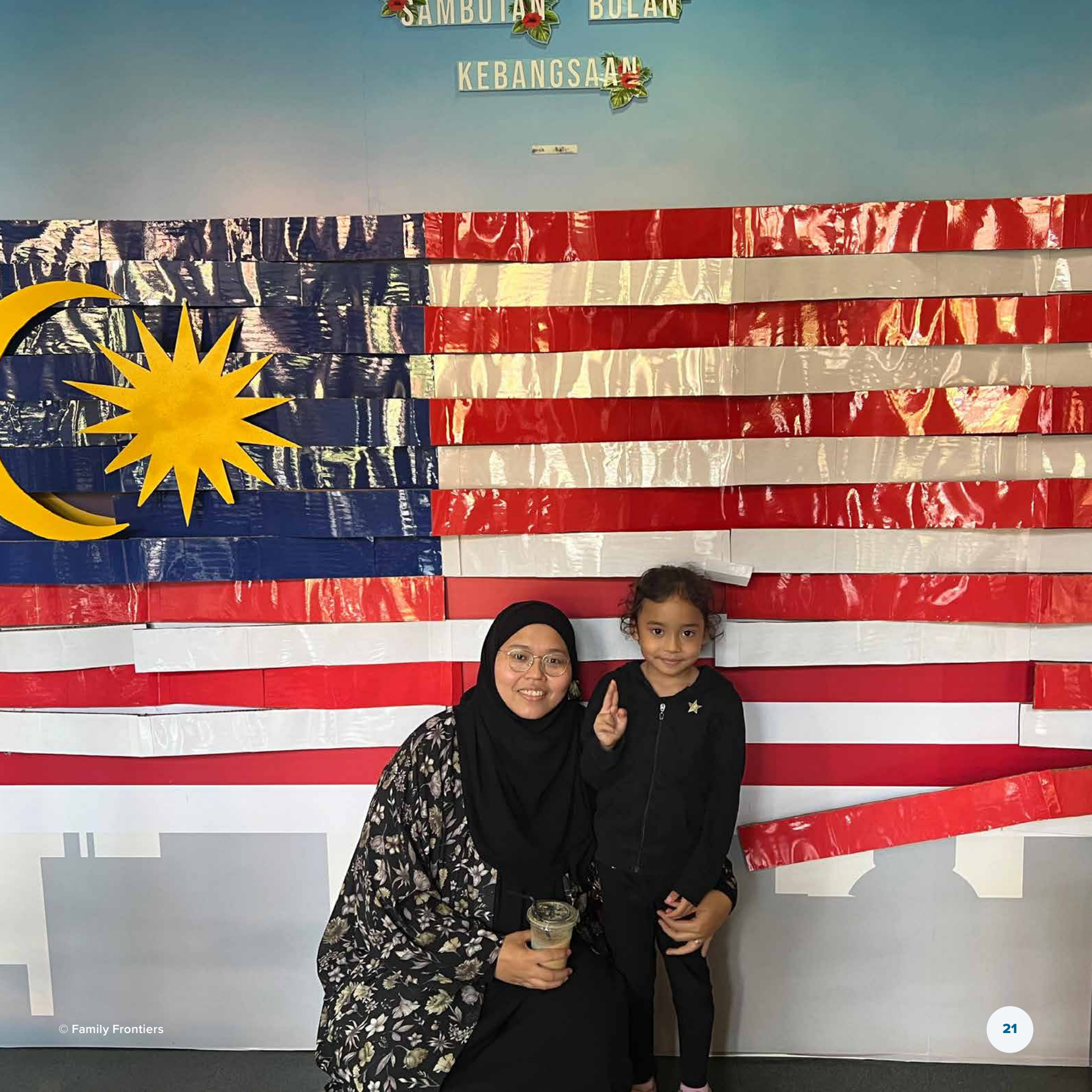
Malaysia



MIMI AND CHILD

QUOTE *"I hope no woman in Malaysia or anywhere else will have to endure the pain and uncertainty of being separated from her children simply because she is a woman."*

Mimi is a Malaysian mother who fought for her child to obtain Malaysian citizenship. Her second child was born in Saudi Arabia but became stateless due to legal provisions that do not permit Malaysian women to confer citizenship at birth to children born abroad. Under the law, children born abroad to Malaysian citizenship mothers do not obtain Malaysian citizenship automatically at birth, but must apply for citizenship by registration, which is often a difficult and long process. Following this application procedure, Mimi's child's Malaysian citizenship was approved in 2024. Now, with citizenship, her child can enjoy full legal protection and rights as a Malaysian citizen, along with access to public services and opportunities.



© Family Frontiers

Malaysia

JOE ANN

QUOTE *"I believe every person has dreams and the right to pursue what they desire. It's unfair for someone's life to be defined by the absence of a single document."*

"Citizenship is more than just a piece of paper—it is the key that unlocks opportunities and allows a person to fully live their life."

Joe Ann is a 24-year-old woman who was born and raised in Malaysia as a stateless adopted child. Despite being stateless, Joe Ann managed to complete her law degree and finally, in July 2023, she received her citizenship and MyKad (Malaysian citizenship card). She had applied three times for citizenship by registration for persons with special circumstances; her persistence paid off when she was successful on her third attempt. Growing up stateless, Joe Ann was unable to apply for student loans, open a bank account, obtain a driver's license or use a digital wallet, which is increasingly required to pay for everyday expenses. She found it particularly painful that her stateless status made it impossible for her to assist with registering the death of her adoptive father when he died. As she missed out many opportunities in life when she was stateless, she has been trying her best to catch up on everything, such as applying for a passport and exploring the world together with her mother. Joe Ann brings her personal lived experiences of statelessness to her work as a paralegal and project coordinator at Development of Human Resources for Rural Areas, Malaysia.



© UNHCR/Alia Wan

Malaysia



Ensuring that women enjoy equal nationality rights as men is a core principle enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

At the time of writing, Malaysia remains one of 24 countries that prevent women from conferring their citizenship to their children born abroad on an equal basis with men. Instead, their children must apply for citizenship by registration under Article 15(2) of the Federal Constitution, a process that proves long and difficult for many.

EQUALITY

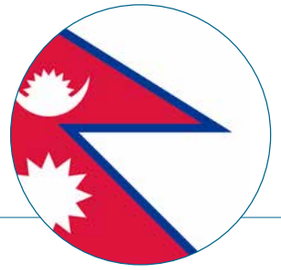
In 2024, Malaysia passed legislation to ensure that

WOMEN HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS AS MEN

to confer nationality to children born outside the country.

In 2024, Malaysia took the important step of tabling amendments to its Federal Constitution to allow women to confer nationality to their children born abroad on the same basis as Malaysian men, a critical move towards ensuring gender equality in nationality laws. This reform was years in the making, building on efforts led by affected Malaysian mothers and civil society. Malaysia has also taken steps to accelerate the processing of citizenship applications, which can bring security and solutions to people in need more quickly.

Nepal



In 2023, Nepal adopted the Citizenship Amendment Act, making it possible for some 1.1 million people to be confirmed and documented as nationals. Key reforms include the removal of barriers to obtaining a citizenship certificate for women who qualify for citizenship by descent, but marry a foreign national prior to obtaining their citizenship certificate; simplified and less burdensome procedures for women to confer nationality to children in cases of unknown paternity; improved access to nationality for children who are foundlings; and access to nationality for some 500,000 persons whose parents acquired a form of nationality that could not be passed on to their children.

Since its entry into force, the law has benefited some 200,000 people by ensuring they are able to obtain a citizenship certificate (Nagarikta), a document that is required to enjoy rights such as sitting for public exams, obtaining a passport, opening a bank account, working in the formal sector, and purchasing a vehicle.

CITIZENSHIP

Nepal's 2023 amendment of its Citizenship Act has already benefited over

200,000

people by ensuring they can obtain a citizenship certificate

Nepal



SANGEETA KARKI

QUOTE

"Citizenship is a journey to self-discovery and freedom. Obtaining citizenship is similar to discovering your inner confidence. It symbolizes a profound sense of freedom – liberation from dependence and the constraints or restrictions of others. In this journey, you realize that true happiness comes from within; you embody the joy of living, independence, and empowerment.""

Sangeeta is a 26-year-old woman from Nepal. Living without citizenship meant confronting daily challenges across many dimensions of her life, like being unable to open a bank account, obtain a driver's license, obtain a SIM card or secure stable employment. With citizenship, she can now enjoy the right to work and pursue higher education. She can now open a bank account, obtain a SIM card in her name, secure a tax registration number and, most importantly for Sangeeta, acquire a national identity card and national passport that allows her to travel abroad.



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Philippines

ALMALYN HAMAN AKMAD

QUOTE

"I help by going house-to-house to inform my fellow Sama Bajau of birth registration activities. I am really happy, it feels good to help, especially now because people really need to have a birth certificate."

Almalyn is a woman from the Sama Bajau community in the Philippines, a population at risk of statelessness due to its nomadic culture and multiple generations of children born without receiving birth certificates. In 2013, the Zamboanga crisis forced Almalyn and her family to evacuate their home and stay in transitory shelters, a situation that persisted until 2017. A community profiling exercise led by Community and Family Services International identified her as needing a birth certificate. After the City Civil Registrar's Office conducted a verification interview to confirm key details, Almalyn was able to receive her birth certificate and proof of nationality. A local community mobilizer supported her in each step of the process by explaining procedures and assisting her where necessary. Now, Almalyn serves as a community mobilizer herself, assisting other parents and families with obtaining birth certificates. Amalyn says that helping others in the Sama Bajau community has empowered her and changed her life for the better. In addition to being a mother of nine children, she works as a community leader in Barangay Kasanyangan, Zamboanga City in the Philippines.

READ MORE ABOUT

Almalyn's story at: Volunteers boost Sama Bajau birth registration amid pandemic | UNHCR



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Philippines



The Philippines has acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and it was the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to establish a dedicated statelessness determination procedure (SDP) in 2012.

In 2022, the Philippines adopted the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act to ensure that all foundlings in the country are issued with official birth certificates and are confirmed as nationals of the country. The Philippines offers a promising model for countries worldwide in terms of national legislation that effectively implements the safeguard against statelessness for foundlings, which is enshrined in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

STATELESSNESS DETERMINATION PROCEDURE

The Philippines is the
1st COUNTRY
in the Asia-Pacific region to establish a statelessness determination procedure, a key step in reliably identifying and protecting stateless persons

In line with its Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness pledges, the Philippines has continued to enhance its policy and legal framework and promote the inclusion of stateless persons and State-identified populations at risk of statelessness in relevant programmes in line with its National Action Plan to End Statelessness, Philippine Development Plan 2023 – 2028, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2024 - 2028.

The Philippines has also worked in collaboration with neighbouring countries, including Japan and Indonesia, to jointly determine and confirm the citizenship status of persons with undetermined nationality, like the descendants of long-staying migrants who lack civil status documentation.

Tajikistan



Statelessness in Tajikistan is caused by multiple factors including the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and legal, policy and administrative obstacles that made it difficult to acquire or confirm nationality. As with other States in Central Asia, Tajikistan has been actively working to end statelessness in its territory, and over 50,000 people have obtained nationality since 2014.

Following Tajikistan's pledges at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019, its Parliament adopted a time-bound Amnesty Law the same year. The Amnesty Law benefited all irregularly residing stateless persons and foreign nationals originating from former U.S.S.R. countries who arrived in Tajikistan before 31 December 2016. The law permitted them to regularize their stay without penalty and entitled them to residence permits that make them eligible to apply for citizenship after two and a half years. Authorities reported that approximately 1,500 people benefited from the law. NGO partners played a crucial role in ensuring effective implementation of the law by conducting joint awareness-raising campaigns for affected communities and capacity building exercises for local authorities and law enforcement.

NEW NATIONALITY

+50,000

people have obtained the nationality of Tajikistan since 2014 due to the dedicated efforts of the government

In 2019, Tajikistan amended its Civil Registration Law, as part of ongoing reform of its civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system. This established free birth registration within the first three months of birth, removed financial obstacles and incentivized the prompt reporting and registration of newborn children. In 2021, Tajikistan's Civil Registration Department launched its first Mobile Civil Registry Office to access communities in hard-to-reach, mountainous areas that have limited internet connectivity.

Tajikistan 

MELIKNOR NOROV

QUOTE *"I have seen hard times, and I want to help people in need."*

Meliknor was born in what is now Tajikistan. As a child, he moved constantly with his father, a shepherd, and had few opportunities for education. He didn't start school until he was 16 years old and was far behind other students. After just four years, he dropped out and returned to work full time. When Tajikistan gained independence, Meliknor's U.S.S.R.-issued identity documents, along with his savings, were stolen, making it impossible for him to prove his identity or acquire Tajikistan nationality. He struggled for years without the right to formal employment, healthcare or stable housing. His fortunes changed when he received legal assistance from the NGO Chashma. With the support of Chashma in collecting the necessary paperwork and completing the application procedure, he obtained the citizenship of Tajikistan, which finally opened the door to formal employment, legal protections for workers and housing assistance. He is currently applying for his pension, which represents his first chance at securing long-term financial stability. Despite many hardships, Meliknor remains selfless, sharing the vegetables he grows on a small plot of land with others in need.



© UNHCR/Muhammadkhuja Davlyatov

Tajikistan

ADOLAT SHABOZOVA

QUOTE

"I have a dream of using my documentation to help my children to build their future ... Now that I have the documentation, thanks to God, I can go places, achieve things that were impossible when I had no documents. Now I have it, and I am happy. I am always happy."

Adolat was born in Kulyab city, in what is now Tajikistan. After getting married, she moved to a different district, becoming her family's sole provider after her husband contracted tuberculosis. It was not until she sought employment as a cleaner at a local school that she realized she was undocumented and at risk of statelessness. With support from UNHCR's partner, Chashma, in obtaining the necessary supporting documentation and completing the application process, Adolat finally obtained her Tajik passport. Now, with official documentation confirming her identity and citizenship, Adolat dreams of getting a better job to give her children a better education and brighter future.



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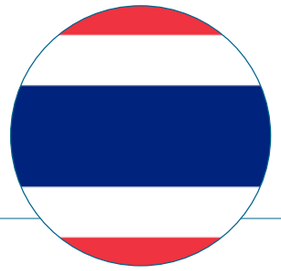
Thailand



Thailand has adopted a range of important measures to achieve universal birth registration, identify and resolve statelessness, and protect the rights of stateless people yet to obtain a nationality. In 2008, Thailand reformed its Civil Registration Act to clarify that birth registration is not limited to the children of Thai nationals, making all children born in its territory eligible for birth certificates irrespective of the parents' nationality and legal status. This has allowed members of stateless communities to register their children's births, while also reducing risks of statelessness for children who are entitled to nationality but would otherwise go undocumented at birth. Effective implementation of the law has led to a national birth registration rate of 99.8 per cent.

Thailand has also taken measures to ensure the enjoyment of key rights by stateless and undocumented people. In line with Section 54 of the Constitution, which establishes that every child must receive free and compulsory primary and secondary education, Thailand adopted an Education for All Policy in 1990, which was expanded in 2005 to cover all children in Thailand irrespective of their nationality or legal status. Stateless children are entitled to free primary and secondary education. Registered stateless persons in Thailand are also allowed to work in certain vocations, where they enjoy full protections under national labour laws.

EDUCATION

Thailand's 'Education for All' Policy serves as a

MODEL APPROACH

in ensuring that stateless children are able to attend school and enjoy their right to an education

In 2024, the Government of Thailand approved an ambitious plan to resolve statelessness for over 480,000 persons. The plan calls for accelerating the process of granting Thai nationality to 140,000 registered stateless persons who have already acquired permanent residency status and to streamline the pathway for the remaining 340,000 persons, giving them the ability to apply for Thai nationality after five years. Successful implementation of this plan would represent the single largest reduction of stateless ever achieved by a single country.

Turkmenistan



Since 2014, Turkmenistan has made significant process in addressing statelessness, including by confirming and documenting the citizenship of more than 15,800 people. The country has the distinction of having ratified both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, while also strengthening its national legislation.

In 2020, Turkmenistan introduced a law on Civil Status Acts ensuring all children born in the country can be registered at birth, including those born to undocumented parents. In 2021, Turkmenistan adopted a statelessness determination procedure (SDP). Persons recognized as stateless through this procedure are provided with a “stateless person’s certificate” enabling them to reside lawfully in the country and access legal employment, public services and healthcare.

STATELESSNESS

Turkmenistan is the

LATEST COUNTRY

to resolve all known cases of statelessness in its territory

In September 2024, Turkmenistan became the latest country worldwide to resolve all known cases of statelessness in its territory. Citizenship documents were presented to the remaining 1,146 stateless people at a ceremony in Ashgabat, completing the process of resolving all known cases in the country.

Thailand

MEEPIA CHUMEE

QUOTE

"The day I held the Thai ID card in my hand, I felt happiness and massive relief. Even though I may not have money like others, I now have the same rights as them. I don't have to live in fear anymore."

Meepia is a woman of Akha ethnicity who lives in Chiang Mai Province. She was born to a Thai citizen mother and a stateless father. She was abandoned at a young age, and never had her birth registered. Meepia was raised by her grandmother, a stateless person herself, and her uncle. At the age of 34, Meepia finally obtained Thai nationality with the help of the Local Community Network, a grassroots organization working to end statelessness in Thailand.

READ MORE ABOUT

Meepia's story at: How Thailand's grassroots organizations are working to end statelessness | UNHCR



© UNHCR/Rachaphon Riansiri

Thailand

AOEY THONG-NGERN

QUOTE *"The first day that I got my ID card, I hugged it like this. I was very happy".*

Aoey Thong-ngern is a 74-year-old woman living in Chiang Rai Province. She was born to Thai parents, but never had her birth registered. She missed the opportunity to take part in the important profile registration exercises conducted by the Ministry of Interior in 1999 and 2005, which allowed her four siblings to obtain Thai nationality. She finally acquired Thai nationality in 2022 at the age of 72 with the support of Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Thailand.

READ MORE ABOUT Aoey's story at: Happy Songkran and Thai Family Day. (sgsupport.asia)



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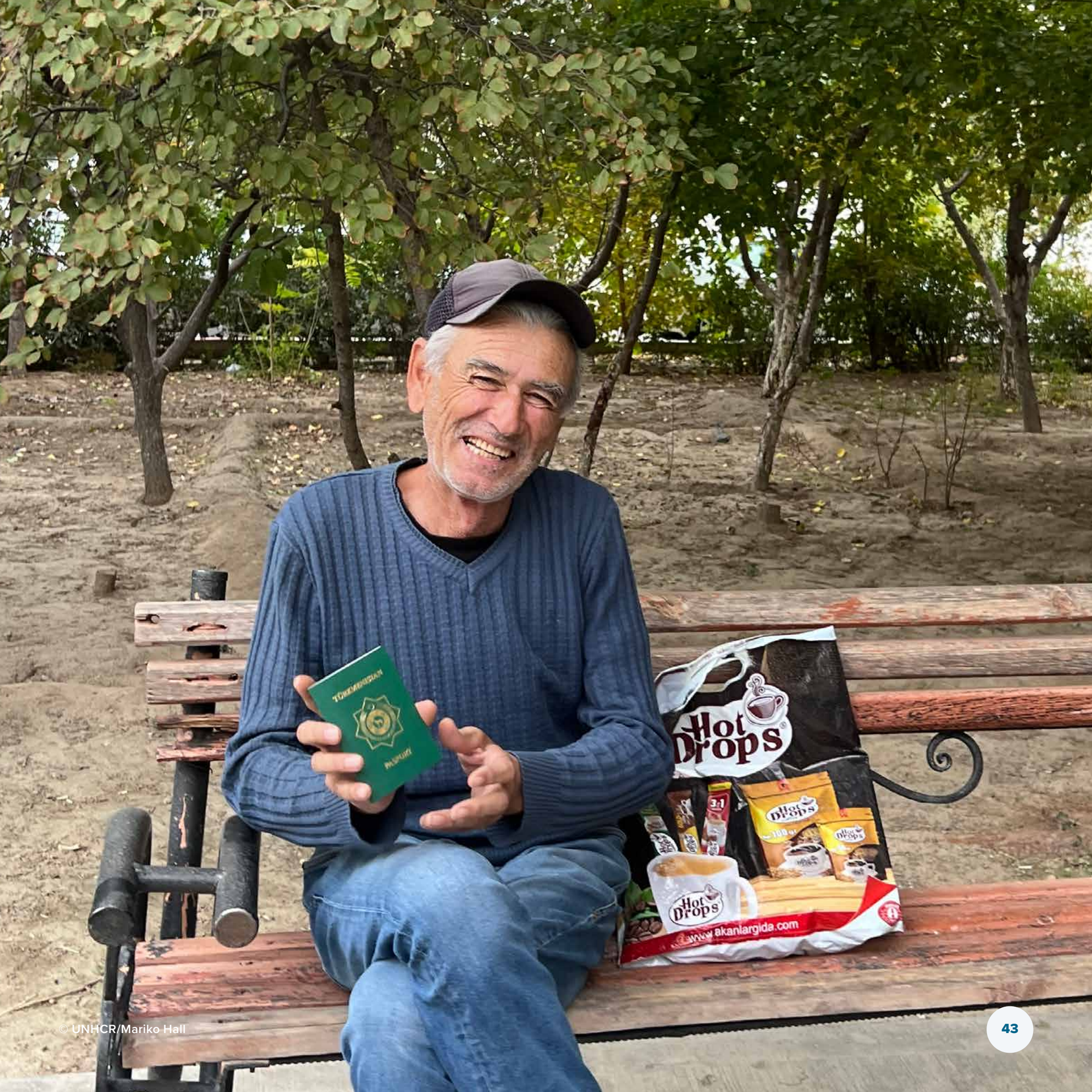
Turkmenistan 

MATNAZOR

QUOTE *"When I got my red passport [issued to stateless persons], I stopped being questioned by policemen on the streets. Now that I finally have a national passport of Turkmenistan, I don't face such situations. I was in seventh heaven! I was very happy when I received my passport."*

Matnazor was born in the 1960s in in the Soviet Union in a republic that would become part of Turkmenistan after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. In the 1980s he took part in a youth exchange programme that brought him to what is now the Russian Federation, where he worked for a number of years. After returning to Turkmenistan, however, he lost his U.S.S.R. passport. Without a passport, he could no longer return to the Russian Federation, and since he had previously completed his 'propiska' (State registration) in the Russian Federation, he was unable to apply for citizenship in Turkmenistan. For over three decades, Matnazor lived without nationality, identity documents or a clear legal status. With the support of UNHCR's partner, Keik Okara, Matnazor was able to receive official documentation from the Russian Federation confirming that he did not possess Russian nationality. This enabled him to be documented as a stateless person in Turkmenistan and then finally become a citizen of Turkmenistan.



© UNHCR/Mariko Hall

Uzbekistan



MUKHAMADJON TURGUNOV

QUOTE

"It's impossible to describe the feeling. It's like being born again".

"Sportsmen always have stronger patriotic feelings than other people because they represent the country. The whole world has opened in front of me, but I want to stay in Uzbekistan and coach my students. I will show that granting me citizenship was a good decision."

Mukhamadjon was born in 1991 to ethnic Uzbek parents in what is now Kyrgyzstan, four months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The family moved to Uzbekistan the following year, but arrived too late to claim citizenship and he became stateless. As a former kickboxing champion, and now a taekwondo trainer, Mukhamadjon faced difficulties travelling abroad to participate in tournaments, until April 2020 when he finally obtained the citizenship of Uzbekistan.

READ MORE ABOUT

Mukhamadjon's story at: 'A whole new world has opened in front of me' | UNHCR)



© UNHCR/Elyor Nemat

Uzbekistan



After the dissolution of the Soviet Unition, Uzbekistan was left with a very large stateless community relative to the size of its total population, with over 97,000 documented cases. In 2018, Uzbekistan adopted legislation to ensure universal birth registration, and in 2020 amended its citizenship law making over 60,000 previously stateless people eligible for citizenship. In 2021, Uzbekistan confirmed or granted nationality to over 30,000 stateless people, and to an additional 10,000 people in 2022.

Acquiring Uzbek nationality has profoundly improved the lives of formerly stateless people, particularly in terms of legal rights, access to services, and opportunities. Formerly stateless people in Uzbekistan now enjoy full legal recognition, enjoying rights to vote, own property, and participate in public life. Citizenship also opens the door to essential public services, including healthcare, education, and social protection programmes. With Uzbek citizenship, formerly stateless people can pursue employment in both public and private sectors without the previous legal barriers. This improves their economic prospects and enhances their ability to support their families, contributing to economic stability and personal growth. As Uzbek citizens, formerly stateless persons can now obtain travel documents, granting them the freedom to travel domestically and internationally, which also opens opportunities across international borders for work, education, and family reunification. Citizenship also ensures that children and young adults from formerly stateless families can enrol in public schools and universities, thus improving their long-term opportunities and enabling upward social mobility.

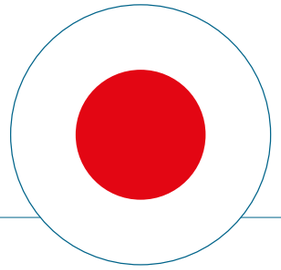
NATIONALITY

In 2021, Uzbekistan confirmed or granted nationality to over

30,000

stateless people, and to an additional 10,000 people in 2022

Japan



Japan was one of the five co-convener States of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, which aimed to galvanize efforts and commitments to address refugee and statelessness issues. Under Japan's nationality law, nationality is automatically granted to the children of stateless or unknown parents born (or found) in Japan, and naturalization is facilitated for other children born in Japan who would otherwise be stateless. In 2024, the Immigration Services Agency published amended guidelines which noted that an individual's status as stateless person should be viewed favourably in granting persons residing unlawfully in the country with lawful special permission to stay. These guidelines are also the basis for more systematic identification of people without nationality to ensure they are protected from removal or indefinite immigration detention. The government has launched measures to resolve the issue of the "*mukosekisha*", which concerns Japanese nationals who are not recorded in a family register and therefore lack official evidence of their status as nationals of the country.

COOPERATION

Japan funds and supports

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION TO RESOLVE STATELESSNESS

through nationality confirmation exercises and expanded birth registration initiatives in key countries.

In collaboration with the Government of the Philippines, Japan is also making efforts to speedily confirm the Japanese nationality of Persons of Japanese Descent in the Philippines who are at risk of statelessness.

Japan has also made financial contributions to closing gaps in birth registration in the broader region such as funding projects to strengthen birth registration in provinces in the Philippines where access to birth certificates has remained the lowest.

Japan

RURIKA HASEGAWA

QUOTE *"Obtaining Japanese nationality has given me the freedom to travel abroad, which has allowed me to work on refugee and statelessness issues not only domestically but also internationally."*

Rurika Hasegawa is a Rohingya woman who came to Japan from Myanmar at 12 years of age. In Japan, she lived as a stateless person until she was naturalized in March 2013. After graduating from high school, she was compelled to give up her dream of studying abroad and attending university due to her statelessness. However, she graduated from a design college and worked for an architectural company. With the positive example and support of her father, who co-founded the Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan, Rurika started to work on refugee and statelessness issues. She has been working with the national Stateless Network of Japan since 2013, and was subsequently appointed to a leadership role as the Network's Co-Representative in 2024.



© Rurika Hasegawa

2

CIVIL SOCIETY *LEADERS*

Civil society organizations and their leaders have amplified the voices of stateless people, connecting them with basic services like schools and hospitals, and supporting them in obtaining a nationality so they fully belong to their communities and countries. This section highlights a range of indispensable efforts made by leading civil society organizations and their staff, many of whom are persons who were formerly stateless themselves or otherwise impacted by statelessness in their families.



© UNHCR/Uma Bista

DEEPTI GURUNG



QUOTE *"My journey into statelessness advocacy began with my own family's struggle against discriminatory citizenship laws. For years, I fought for the right to confer citizenship to my daughters, a right that was denied to us. My now husband was also unable to receive citizenship through his mother at the time, adding to the challenges we faced as a family."*

2024 NANSEN AWARD WINNER AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE CITIZENSHIP AFFECTED PEOPLE'S NETWORK (CAPN), NEPAL

After trying unsuccessfully for years to secure nationality rights for her own children, Deepti filed a case before the Supreme Court of Nepal, which ruled in her favour, finally allowing her undocumented daughters to obtain the citizenship of Nepal.

Drawing on her own family's experiences, Deepti went on to found the Citizenship Affected People's Network (CAPN), a national civil society organization dedicated to advocating for gender-equal citizenship laws. CAPN was formed organically in 2015 as a network of more than 1,800 people struggling to acquire nationality or have their citizenship status officially confirmed and documented.

CAPN's mission goes beyond advocating for legal reforms. It also focuses on empowering affected individuals and building community knowledge and capacities. CAPN provides direct assistance to stateless and undocumented people by gathering the necessary paperwork, guiding them through procedures that can be long and complex, and advocating on their behalf in all steps. CAPN was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 2021 and is a member of Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP).

Photo credits: © UNHCR/Uma Bista

SABIN SHRESTHA



QUOTE *"Everyone deserves the right to belong somewhere, to have an identity that connects them to a community. Securing citizenship goes beyond paperwork—it's about human dignity and access to fundamental rights."*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FORUM FOR WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT (FWLD)

Sabin Shrestha is the Executive Director of the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) in Nepal. He has championed the rights of stateless people in Nepal for over 20 years, advocating for reforms that enable marginalized groups, especially women and children, to secure citizenship and legal identity. Sabin provided expert substantive contributions to support the drafting of Nepal's Interim Constitution of 2007 as well as its national Constitution of 2015, which recognize citizenship as a constitutional right. He was instrumental in the development of the recent Citizenship Amendment Act of 2023, which removes procedural barriers to confirming one's citizenship status, resulting in over 200,000 people obtaining citizenship certificates who were previously unable to do so.

FWLD's para-legal services have allowed over 32,000 people to obtain citizenship certificates between 2023 and 2024. In 2024, FWLD became a member of the Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP). Although Sabin's specialization is nationality and constitutional law, he sees the issue of statelessness as one of basic human dignity, inclusion and opportunity.

Photo credits: © Forum for Women, Law and Development

SIRAZUL ISLAM



For Sirazul,

"nationality is more than a legal status or a piece of paper. It symbolizes belonging and identity."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR AT THE EUROPEAN NETWORK ON STATELESSNESS

Sirazul Islam is a member of the Rohingya community who was born in Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Bangladesh. He was stateless for 18 years before acquiring nationality in 2018. After his acquisition of nationality, he has been able to enjoy fundamental rights and basic services, such as education and healthcare, which were out of reach before. He now has both Bachelor (LLB) and Master of Laws (LLM) and is currently living in the United Kingdom, where he works for the European Network on Statelessness. Sirazul is a vocal advocate for stateless communities in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide, with his work focusing on community empowerment initiatives aiming to help stateless people claim their rights and obtain citizenship.

Photo credits: © Amir Mahdavi and Honour Burges in London



TAHERA HASAN

FOUNDER, IMKKAN WELFARE ORGANIZATION, PAKISTAN

For Tahera,

"statelessness is a profound human rights issue that strips millions of their identity, security, and future. Addressing this requires urgent and collective action. The most important step we can take is to ensure that every person has access to legal documentation and a path to citizenship. By prioritizing legal reforms and ensuring that stateless individuals are included in decision-making processes."

Tahera Hasan is the Founder of Imkaan Welfare Organization which was established in 2012. Tahera began working with vulnerable stateless communities in 2012, initially unaware of the profound impact that statelessness had on their lives. At that point her organization was focused on child protection issues, including child abandonment, violence against children and placing children in alternative care arrangements. As she implemented various projects, it became increasingly clear how the lack of nationality and identity documents amplified the vulnerabilities of the children and families she worked with. The legal aid project that Tahera established was the first in the country to directly tackle their challenges arising from the lack of a legally recognized identity.

Her work remains grounded in grassroots engagement, particularly with women, children and youth. Every project begins with community consultations to ensure that it meets local needs, priorities and expectations, and most staff at the Imkaan Welfare Organization are individuals with lived experience—people who are stateless, formerly stateless, undocumented, or currently grappling with issues related to their citizenship rights.

The Imkaan Welfare Organization is a member of Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP).

Photo credits: © Imkaan Welfare Organization

RADHA GOVIL



Reflecting on her current work, as well as her prior role as a Senior Legal Officer in the Statelessness Section of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, Radha emphasized that,

"statelessness has no place is a world that we have chosen to organize by State. We must work together in an interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder fashion, with those with lived experience of statelessness at the centre of all efforts."

ACTING DIRECTOR, PETER MCMULLIN CENTRE ON STATELESSNESS

As Acting Director for the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness (PMCS), Radha leads the Centre's work to prevent and reduce statelessness by ensuring policy makers have the data, evidence, research and analysis necessary to make need to make better-informed decisions. Her scholarship, advocacy and teaching highlight data confirming that resolving statelessness contributes to stronger economies and communities.

PMCS was established in 2018 at the University of Melbourne Law School through a generous grant from **Peter and Ruth McMullin**. As the world's only university-based interdisciplinary centre dedicated to studying and finding solutions to statelessness, PMCS prioritizes the active involvement of people with lived experience of statelessness. Stateless and formerly stateless people are students and interns at PMCS, and many also serve as presenters during the annual PMCS Statelessness Intensive Course. In 2021, the Statelessness Legal Clinic was established at the PMCS, supported by the Cameron Foundation, an innovative programme where law students are mentored with providing direct legal aid to individuals and families impacted by statelessness.

Photo credits: © Greta Robenstone

KHALID HUSSAIN



Khalid reminds us that although the Urdu-speaking community members have acquired citizenship, many still live in informal settlements

"Our legal issues are very clear and transparent. Now the time has come to think about rehabilitation of the camp-based Bihari Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis. We need the support of the UN and the international community to start this work."

FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, COUNCIL OF MINORITIES

Khalid Hussain is a formerly stateless person who started working on statelessness in 1999. He was born stateless, finally obtaining Bangladeshi citizenship in May 2003. In 2013, Khalid established the Council of Minorities, a leading non-profit human rights organization with a special focus on the Urdu-speaking community, commonly known as *Biharis* in the country, who were stateless prior to a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in 2008 recognizing their right to Bangladeshi nationality. The Council of Minorities implements a range of activities, including a paralegal project to improve access to legal aid and empowerment; projects that improve access to education and skill development, along with initiatives to strengthen land rights and land rehabilitation for members of the Urdu-speaking community residing in camps.

Photo credits: © Zahidul Islam Sazib

SHAKHNOZA KHASSANOVA



QUOTE *"Statelessness is a challenge that can be solved if we act decisively and in concert," Shakhnoza says. "I call on all members of the international community to continue their active efforts in this area and strengthen global and regional coalitions to achieve our common goal of a world in which everyone has citizenship and access to their rights."*

HEAD OF THE PUBLIC ASSOCIATE LEGAL CENTER FOR WOMEN'S INITIATIVES SANA SEZIM

Shakhnoza Khassanova is the Head of Legal Center for Women's Initiatives 'Sana Sezim', which started working on statelessness in 2016. Their activities range from direct legal assistance for stateless people to advocacy for legislative reform. The organization actively involves people who are stateless, or formerly stateless, in the work of planning, developing, and implementing programmes, which helps to ensure the organization is attuned to the actual needs and difficulties faced by stateless and undocumented persons. Shakhnoza has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of stateless people and facilitating their access to essential official documentation and birth registration.

Photo credits: © Sana Sezim

MORE SPECIFICALLY, SHAKHNOZA ASKS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING KEY STEPS:

1. Strengthening the legal framework and international cooperation: States should improve legislative frameworks to ensure that every child enjoys its right to acquire a nationality at birth. This will require active cooperation between countries, as well as the support of international organizations to provide legal and technical assistance.

2. Awareness-raising and access to birth registration: It is important to conduct awareness-raising campaigns among vulnerable groups and to improve registration systems by making them more accessible and efficient.

3. Elimination of discrimination in legislation: The nationality laws of several countries still feature discrimination based on gender, religion, or ethnicity, which can lead to statelessness. Removing discriminatory provisions and ensuring equal citizenship rights for all is paramount.

4. Monitoring and data collection: Establishing mechanisms to collect accurate data on the extent of statelessness is essential. Better data will allow States to better understand the problem and direct resources to where they are most needed.

CHEN TIEN-SHI (LARA)



In view of her own experiences, Professor Chen emphasizes that people who are or have been stateless have a critical role to play in understanding and resolving this issue, observing that every person is entitled to human rights, even those who have yet to acquire a nationality:

"A person, regardless of nationality, should enjoy their human rights."

FOUNDER OF STATELESS NETWORK

Chen Tien-shi (Lara) established the Stateless Network in Japan in 2009. Currently a professor at Waseda University, she started life as a stateless person born in Japan to migrant parents. As an anthropologist and researcher, Professor Chen conducts interviews with stateless people and publishes books and articles capturing their histories, needs, experiences and wishes. Over the course of her career, she has focused on connecting stateless people with legal experts from countries where solutions may be possible for them. In 2024, Prof. Chen published an autoethnography entitled *"Stateless"* (NUS Press), and a picture book called *"The Rainbow Pendant"* with contributions from young people involved in the Stateless Network. Both books are based on her lived experiences with statelessness.

Photo credits: © Prof. Dr. Chen Tien-Shi

AZIZBEK ASHUROV



As Azizbek explains,

"the tragic reality of today is that a person is defined by a piece of paper, and not vice versa. If we all work together, we become decision-makers, asking for this change, once and for all. We owe it to them to make them matter."

The Public Fund "Fergana Valley Lawyers Without Borders" has provided legal assistance to over

70,000.

Its outreach efforts helped over 13,7000 stateless people to acquire nationality.

HEAD OF THE PUBLIC FUND "FERGANA VALLEY LAWYERS WITHOUT BORDERS"

Azizbek Ashurov is the Head of the Public Fund "Fergana Valley Lawyers Without Borders" (FVLWB), an NGO founded in 2003 in the Kyrgyz Republic. Azizbek and FVLWB have been instrumental in reducing statelessness and other protection risks, having provided legal assistance to over 70,000 people facing challenges related to migration and nationality status. Azizbek spearheaded a country-wide campaign of door-to-door visits that facilitated the acquisition of nationality for 13,700 stateless people. His efforts played a critical role in helping the Kyrgyz Republic become the first country in the world to eradicate all known cases of statelessness in its territory in 2019, an accomplishment for which Azizbek was selected as the 2019 winner of UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award.

FVLWB is a co-founder and coordinator of the Central Asian Network on Statelessness (CANS). This network includes 12 founding organizations from five Central Asian countries. CANS is also a member of Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP).

Photo credits: © Fergana Valley Lawyers Without Borders

CHOLPON DZHAKUPOVA



Having secured these critical reforms in the laws of her own country, Cholpon advises that

"the international community must recognize the urgent need for action to address statelessness. This includes implementing legislative reforms that simplify the citizenship acquisition process, providing legal pathways to documentation, and ensuring that individuals are not excluded from basic rights due to their lack of nationality. Collaborative efforts between governments, civil society, and international organizations are critical in resolving this issue. Addressing statelessness is not only a matter of human rights but also a necessary step toward social and economic inclusion for all individuals."

HEAD OF THE PUBLIC FOUNDATION LEGAL CLINIC ADILET

Cholpon Dzhakupova is the Head of the Public Foundation Legal Clinic Adilet, an NGO working in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Republic. Cholpon has actively worked on addressing statelessness for over 20 years.

Since its inception in 2002, Adilet, meaning "justice", has actively advised on the drafting of key laws such as the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic On Citizenship, which simplified the procedure for granting citizenship to ethnic Kyrgyz stateless persons. Adilet has provided assistance and representation to over 15,000 people, and it continues to advocate for further reforms in citizen registration and documentation.

Photo credits: © Adilet

MAALINI RAMALO



Drawing on her role as a key member of this regional civil society network and her advocacy on the global stage, Maalini acknowledges the need for approaches that are tailored to locality and context:

"The journey of addressing statelessness varies significantly across different communities, countries, and regions. One should not be deterred by what may seem like minimal progress; every consistent action matters. Ongoing support is crucial for fostering meaningful change in the lives of those affected. Each small step contributes to a larger movement toward justice and equity for stateless individuals and families."

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL PROTECTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR RURAL AREAS (DHRRA MALAYSIA)

Maalini Ramalo is the Director of Social Protection for Development of Human Resources for Rural Areas Malaysia (DHRRA Malaysia). Maalini started working on statelessness in 2014 when she volunteered as a translator for UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign in Malaysia, joining DHRRA Malaysia two years later. Over the last 20 years, DHRRA's has actively promoted the voices and leadership of stateless and formerly stateless people. These efforts started with involving people with lived experiences of statelessness in project design, and later culminated in employing them to directly lead projects assisting stateless communities in Malaysia.

DHRRA Malaysia recently played a pivotal role in advising on proposed legislative amendments by sharing expert analysis and advocacy on which amendments would contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness, especially for vulnerable children. Their efforts were instrumental in identifying and removing draft provisions that could exacerbate risks of statelessness and exclusion. DHRRA Malaysia is a member of Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP) and was one of the co-organizers of the World Conference on Statelessness 2024.

Photo credits: © DHRRA

SANOVBAR IMOMNAZAROVA



Sanovbar wished to reinforce that, for many,

"citizenship is not just a legal status. Citizenship is a state of mind, and it gives people peace of mind, allowing individuals to focus on their future and the well-being of their children without the burden of uncertainty."

CHAIRWOMAN OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATION "CHASHMA"

Sanovbar Imomnazarova is a Chairwoman of the Public Organization "Chashma" that was established in 1998. Sanovbar has led significant efforts to identify and resolve statelessness issues in the Khatlon Province of Tajikistan since 2014. Chashma conducts community outreach in rural areas to raise awareness regarding statelessness, legal identity issues and the services they offer to address these concerns. The organization directly assists stateless and undocumented people with preparing and submitting applications for civil status documentation and passports, depending on their situation, and closely monitors relevant procedures until a positive outcome is achieved.

Photo credits: © PO Chashma

MEEFA ASONG



Meefa has since assumed the role of the leader of the LCN, explaining,

"I feel happy because there are cases that I helped who finally got their citizenship. I'm happy that they have a new life and that their work is better, their healthcare is better. Everything is better. They are now full citizens with all their rights."

LEADER OF LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK (LCN)

Meefa Asong is a formerly stateless person who leads the Local Community Network (LCN) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Based on her own experiences with having been stateless, Meefa empathizes deeply with the stateless community she works with in Akha village. She started working with LCN as a community volunteer, assisting stateless villagers with applying for identity documents, as well as citizenship, by offering her skills in translation and knowledge of the procedures and supporting documents required.

Photo credits: © Rachaphon Riansiri

SANTIPHONG MOONFONG



QUOTE

"When a person has documentation and legal status, society will no longer exclude them, allowing both the individual and the community to develop together. So, I see this not as an individual issue and not just a human rights issue. It touches all dimensions. Achieving this would lead to durable solutions, or as we say, 'Leave No One Behind'."

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL STATUS NETWORK FOUNDATION (LSNF) AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY NETWORK (DCCN)

As the Director of two organizations, Legal Status Network Foundation (LSNF) based in Chiang Mai and Development Center for Children and Community Network (DCCN) based in Mae Hong Son, **Santiphong Moonfong** is a highly experienced and well-known civil society leader.

Santiphong **has been** working on statelessness for over 30 years. Both organizations he works for play a crucial role in assisting stateless people with obtaining legal status and nationality in provinces across Thailand. Santiphong also works closely with the Government of Thailand to advocate for accelerating the nationality application process and strengthening access to rights for people who are still stateless. His current focus is resolving statelessness for stateless students.

Photo credits: © Rachaphon Riansiri

LA-AW KUKAEWKASEM



La-aw feels it is critical to promote the leadership of people who have lived through statelessness themselves, explaining to UNHCR,

"I want local community volunteers to truly belong to the community."

FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF LEGAL ADVOCACY WALK FOUNDATION (LAW)

La-aw Kukaewkasem is the Founder and Director of the Legal Advocacy Walk Foundation (LAW), and she also serves as advisor for the Local Community Network (LCN), a grassroots stateless-led organization working in Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son to support stateless people with successfully completing the process of applying for nationality. In addition to resolving statelessness for the people directly assisted, the work La-aw leads is vital to raising broader awareness about the situation and rights of stateless people.

Photo credits: © Rachaphon Riansiri

SUBIN MULMI

Subin recalled that statelessness often arises from and exacerbates other areas of inequality, explaining that while

"statelessness is one of the most important human rights problems in the world, it is also one of the most under-resourced human rights issues. Statelessness is related to migration, refugee, minority rights, discrimination, state marginalization, climate change, gender, race, caste, and all other human rights issues. It is high time States and the international community take substantial and sustainable steps to ensure every person has a nationality and is treated equally as any other national."

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NATIONALITY FOR ALL (NFA)

Subin Mulmi is the Executive Director of Nationality For All, which works on preventing and reducing statelessness across the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, and recently served as a co-organizer for the 2024 World Conference on Statelessness. Subin started working on statelessness in 2014 at the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), a prominent women's rights NGO based in Nepal established by women leaders to promote full implementation of the CEDAW.



NFA was formed in 2021 with the goal of building a regional civil society movement to address statelessness, culminating in the successful launch of the Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP)in 2024, for which NFA now serves as the Secretariat. The Coalition emphasizes the importance of cultivating leadership among people who have lived through the experience of statelessness. Of the Coalition's 21 member organizations, five are led by people who have been stateless, and two seats are reserved for stateless or formerly stateless people in the Coalition's governance structure. In addition to supporting its member organizations and conducting national, regional and global advocacy, NFA also publishes expert commentary and analysis, including the Statelessness Encyclopedia Asia Pacific (SEAP). The SEAP provides analyses of the overall situation in the Asia-Pacific region, thematic and sub-regional analyses, along with 45 country chapters for individual States, each of which features data, demographic and legal information on statelessness.

Photo credits: © Subin Mulmi (NFA)

3

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP: ENDING STATELESSNESS TOGETHER



© UNHCR/Apipar Norapoompipat

Resolving statelessness often requires the collective efforts of States, impacted communities and civil society organizations advocating for nationality rights, inclusion and protection. For many, if not most of the formerly stateless people featured in this publication, civil society organizations were instrumental in helping them complete the procedures necessary to obtain nationality and identity documentation. UNHCR is proud to fund and partner with these organizations, which bring specialized expertise in many of the issues linked to statelessness, such as gender equality and women's rights, addressing gender-based violence, child rights, legal identity and nationality law. They include the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (BHR), Sana Sezim, Chashma, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Thailand, Legal Clinic Adilet, the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) and Keik Okara, among others.



BUILDING COOPERATION ACROSS STATES AND SECTORS

QUOTE *"Collaboration is pivotal to success especially for cases that have multinational elements [...] Addressing statelessness is to seek to secure a nationality of a country where a person has the closet legal connection. Such country is not necessarily his or her country of residence. Thus, cooperation from an expert from the country of the person's potential nationality is crucial. Since a person is to be considered as a national by a State, engaging government authorities is also key to resolving statelessness in practice."*



Statelessness can arise in the context of migration, especially where migrants go undocumented over several generations and can no longer confirm their status as nationals of their country of origin. Children can also be at risk of statelessness where their parents have different nationalities, or where one parent is absent, stateless or undocumented. In these more complex situations, resolving statelessness may require the joint efforts of various States and organizations working together.

Bongkot Napaumporn started working on statelessness as a researcher and legal advocate at Thammasat University's legal clinic in Thailand. In 2010, she was introduced to the Stateless Network, a non-profit organization supporting stateless people in Japan. Since then, she has fostered cross-country collaboration to provide legal aid to stateless people in Japan who have links to Thailand.

Photo credits: © Bongkot Napaumporn



In 2019, the Stateless Network introduced Bongkot to **Malee Janu**, an indigenous woman from Chiang Rai, Thailand, who was entitled to Thai nationality under the law but unable at the time to confirm her status as a citizen. To resolve her situation, Bongkot and her colleagues enlisted the support of both civil society and government stakeholders in Thailand and Japan.

Malee Janu is originally from the 'Lahu' ethnic community in the Mae Chan District of Chiang Rai province. She was born in Thailand, where her family has resided for generations. Malee was born at home, and therefore her birth was not officially registered, tragically becoming a victim of human trafficking later in life, which brought her to Japan. Consequently, she also missed the important registration exercises conducted by the Government of Thailand to include ethnic Hill Tribe populations in the national civil register. In Japan, Malee lived without any evidence of citizenship for 32 years, even though she actually qualified for Thai nationality.

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BRINGING GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS TOGETHER

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, **Bongkot** travelled to meet Malee's family in-person in Chiang Rai to collect information to support of her application for confirmation of Thai nationality. She was connected to community leaders by a prominent statelessness advocate, Tuenjai Deetes, who co-founded the Hill Area and Community Development Foundation. Based on the information she gathered firsthand in Mae Chan, Bongkot prepared a report analysing the legal status of Malee and her parents, which she submitted to Director of the Bureau of Registration Administration, Ministry of Interior, requesting their assistance as Malee had been stranded in Japan for over 30 years with no proof of citizenship. Bongkot's efforts proved successful, leading to Malee being confirmed and documented as a citizen of Thailand.

Bongkot worked closely with the Stateless Network in Japan, the Royal Thai Embassy in Tokyo and the Tokyo Regional Immigration Bureau. As a result of this collaboration, in August 2024, Malee was issued with an Emergency Travel Document that facilitated her safe return to Thailand on 16 September 2024. Officials from the Airport of Thailand and staff from Mirror Foundation's legal clinic coordinated Malee's onward travel to her hometown in Chiang Rai, and the NGO Mirror Foundation personally accompanied her to the Mae Chan District Office on 18 September 2024 to deliver her application requesting to be registered in the household registration as a Thai national. With support from a constellation of civil society and government bodies in both Thailand and Japan, on 1 October 2024, Malee was officially registered as a Thai national and received her first ever Thai ID card.

Bilateral cooperation between the **Governments of the Philippines** and **Indonesia** offers another positive example. Both Governments collaborate to solve statelessness among persons of Indonesian descent (PID) residing in the Philippines who have no proof of nationality. Through the bilateral efforts between these two countries, by end of



QUOTE *"I feel so grateful for everyone who has supported me. I remember everyone and want to help them in return if I can."*

December 2023, nationality status for 6,153 PID was confirmed. Similarly, the **Governments of the Philippines** and **Japan** also collaborated to verify and confirm the Japanese nationality of persons of Japanese descent in the Philippines. With the assistance of the Philippine Nikkeijin Legal Support Centre (PNLSC), by the end of March 2024, 1,615 persons of Japanese descent (at risk of statelessness due to insufficient documentary evidence) have been able to confirm their acquisition of Japanese nationality.

In addition to multi-lateral cooperation involving several States, individual countries in the region are also formalizing cooperation at the national level between government and civil society organizations. **Thailand** and **the Philippines**, for instance, have formalized collaboration between civil society organizations and competent government entities to jointly resolve complex cases. In **Thailand**, cooperation between Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, the National Institute of Forensic Science and other counterparts has been instrumental in identifying and restoring family links through DNA-testing for undocumented homeless or street-dwelling children, which has aided not only in confirming their identities and legal status, but also in securing family-based placement in their best interests.

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INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS

QUOTE

"Before you invest your money, invest your time and your curiosity to really listen and learn about the gaps that need filling in these critical areas of human rights. For us, the experience of working with the University of Melbourne to identify statelessness as the issue in which we wanted to invest was fantastic because we learned an incredible amount about the projects that the university was working on, but also where the most impact from our investment could be felt."



Peter and Ruth McMullin are philanthropic donors whose generous support was instrumental in establishing the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness (PMCS). When the idea of establishing the first global academic centre dedicated to resolving statelessness was first proposed by the University of Melbourne Law School, Peter and Ruth felt compelled to help them realize this vision because of the absence of data, evidence and awareness of this problem serves a significant impediment to its resolution, observing that **"we hope by our example, we can demonstrate to the broader community the benefits private sector can bring to the issues such as statelessness."**

Photo credits: © University of Melbourne

Peter and Ruth continue to have high ambitions for PMCS, which they see as exceeding their expectations in key areas, including interdisciplinary research, teaching and training, and working in partnership with key actors at the global, regional and national levels to effectively address statelessness.

Peter and Ruth emphasize that statelessness is a solvable issue, and one where the private sector can play a critical role in securing solutions and improving lives.

The **Data for Health (D4H)** initiative was launched in 2015 as partnership between the Bloomberg Foundation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to help countries strengthen their national civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, with particular attention to the role of inclusive CRVS systems in improving public health responses and outcomes. In the Asia-Pacific region, the D4H initiative has funded innovative programmes in countries like Indonesia and Bangladesh, as well as regional partners, such as Vital Strategies and the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, both of which support States across the Asia-Pacific region with ensuring that civil registration services are inclusive and accessible to all people and that national vital statistics databases are comprehensive, accurate and reliable. These initiatives are also concretely advancing the goals of the UN-ESCAP CRVS Decade in the Asia-Pacific region, namely reaching universal birth registration and registration of other vital events; ensuring every person has identity and civil status documentation; and building comprehensive vital statistics.

4

GLOBAL ALLIANCE *TO END STATELESSNESS*



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The **Global Alliance to End Statelessness** was launched by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in October 2024 to establish a broad, multi-stakeholder partnership to address statelessness as a shared priority. It has already attracted over a hundred members, including universities, civil society organizations, UN entities, intergovernmental organizations and States, with the latter playing the most critical role in the resolution of statelessness as entities with the authority to grant citizenship and confirm nationality status.

In the Asia-Pacific region, as of November 2024, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkmenistan have already taken the important step of joining the Global Alliance, underlining their endorsement of the need for individual and collective action by governments and other stakeholders to address this issue. The Philippines also serves as a Global Alliance Solutions Seeker, explaining at UNHCR's 2024 High-Level Segment on Statelessness that it views this role as *"an opportunity to establish a bridge between international cooperation, international legal commitments and local action"*.

OUR MEMBERS

143	TOTAL MEMBERS
25	GOVERNMENTS
11	INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
4	UN AGENCIES
18	STATELESS-LED ORGANIZATIONS
67	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
7	ACADEMIAS
5	FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
1	INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS
4	OTHER

GLOBAL ALLIANCE THEMATIC WORKSTREAMS

Centring and promoting the voices and leadership of people with lived experiences of statelessness is vital to the effectiveness of each of these objectives.

The leadership, innovation and collaborative approaches demonstrated by States in Central Asia, and the broader Asia-Pacific region, **demonstrate that statelessness is indeed solvable** and serve as inspiration and models for countries worldwide.

- *Ending childhood stateless*
- *Protecting the rights of stateless persons*
- *Addressing discrimination in nationality laws and policies*



UNHCR thanks the following donors who provided unearmarked and softly earmarked funds, as well as those who contributed directly to UNHCR operations in the Asia and the Pacific region. Your support has been invaluable in assisting and protecting stateless people and people forced to flee.



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For the latest Asia and the Pacific funding update, please see here. For more information on UNHCR's work to end statelessness, please visit the Ending Statelessness page. For more information on UNHCR's work in the region, please see the 2025 Global Appeal and Operational Data Portal.